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New York

President: Mr. Opertti . . . . . (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 40

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/53/550, A/53/652)

Draft resolutions (A/53/L.52, A/53/L.53 and Corr.1)

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

On a personal note, let me express my hope that the interest that the United Nations takes in Middle East issues is not reflected by the number of representatives present in this Hall at the beginning of the debate.

At the beginning of this decade, the Madrid Conference and the Oslo process opened the way for mutual recognition between Israel and its neighbours, and for a negotiated peace in the entire region. The people of the Middle East found themselves in a situation where life in security, mutual respect, dignity and peace seemed finally at hand. However, this tremendous hope has often been challenged over the years. The absence of progress in the negotiations, reluctance to implement agreements, terrorism and the upsurge of violence have undermined mutual trust, as well as the parties' confidence in the peace process.

Today, the European Union feels encouraged in its hope for early peace in the Middle East by the important forward movement on the Palestinian track brought about at Wye River Plantation on 23 October 1998. In the meantime, initial steps have been taken with a view to implementing the obligations under the Wye River Memorandum. We encourage the parties to proceed further on this promising path, to complete their negotiations on the remaining issues under the Interim Agreement and to engage fully in final status negotiations. In this context, the European Union also calls upon the international community to lend its full support to the parties at this important juncture in the peace process.

The European Union hopes and expects that this recent breakthrough on the Palestinian track will have positive effects on the Middle East as a whole. We are of the opinion that it is of the highest importance to reinvigorate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace based on the

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principle of land for peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In this context, we reiterate our call for speedy implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

The European Union strongly supports the right of Israel to live within safe and recognized borders. We condemn in the strongest terms acts of terrorism and stress our determination to fight terrorism wherever it occurs. We therefore urge all the parties in the peace process to do their utmost to forestall extremist actions and to deny success to extremists and others seeking to frustrate the process through provocation.

We also reaffirm our basic position concerning the status of Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which affirms, in particular, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

It is essential that the parties fully honour their obligations in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo process with a view to rebuilding and strengthening mutual trust. With this in mind, the European Union calls upon the parties to avoid all unilateral acts which could prejudge the outcome of bilateral negotiations. In this context, the European Union reiterates that the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention are to be strictly implemented with regard to all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

The President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union, Vice-Chancellor Mr. Wolfgang Schüssel, accompanied by representatives of the European Commission and by the European Union's Special Envoy, Ambassador Moratinos, visited the Middle East in mid-November. In numerous discussions with political leaders in the region, they underlined the deep commitment of the European Union to the peace process and its determination to play a substantial part in the political and economic fields.

In this regard, the European Union will continue its efforts, in particular through Special Envoy Moratinos, to help restart negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. We also reaffirm our readiness to be fully associated with the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum and to contribute to the final status issues to be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians. Likewise, the European Union remains determined to help relaunch the multilateral negotiations which deal with strategic issues affecting the Middle East and which began with the Madrid Conference in 1991.

Recognizing the importance of a sound economy to social and political stability, the European Union will continue its considerable economic and technical assistance. In this context, we will be extensively involved in the follow-up to the Ministerial Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development, which took place yesterday in Washington, D.C.

In concluding, the European Union would like to reiterate its firm commitment to the peace process based on the principles enshrined in the Madrid and Oslo accords, as well as in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The European Union has a lot to offer in this context and is determined to play its full part in order to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Gold (Israel): The situation in Lebanon has become a microcosm of the situation in the entire Middle East. The continuing failure of the Government of Lebanon to assert its authority over its own territory has produced a dangerous vacuum that has been exploited by the forces determined to undermine the stability of the entire region. It would be a gross miscalculation to assume that Israel is the only country affected by the vast infrastructure of international terrorism that has spread through the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon; Hezbollah strikes at Israeli soldiers and at villages in northern Israel, but its offshoots reach as far as Bahrain, Dahran in Saudi Arabia and into Kuwait; the Abu Nidal organization has struck at Turkey, Pakistan, Greece and Jordan. Militant fundamentalists from Egypt and Saudi Arabia have trained in recent years in the Bekaa Valley as well.

There is a simple way to quickly improve the security of the entire Middle East. It does not require elaborate security architectures borrowed from the experience of Europe. It does not have to await the emergence of pluralistic democratic institutions across the region based on accountable government and free elections. It does not even require formal peace treaties between all the States of the region. The shortest path to regional stability in the Middle East is dismantling the elaborate infrastructure of international terrorism in Lebanon. Israel's acceptance of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) this year can serve as a foundation for this more secure future.

What, after all, has Israel intended in accepting this resolution? It has expressed its willingness to withdraw its remaining forces from the southern Lebanon security zone as long as two other interrelated concerns are addressed in accordance with the language of the resolution. First, Lebanon's authority must be restored in the south; Israel believes that the Lebanese army of 1998 is fully capable of taking on this responsibility. Secondly, Israel seeks security arrangements that will assure that the international border to which the Israel Defence Forces will withdraw will be secure. Israel seeks only the assurance that any area from which it withdraws does not become a springboard for terrorist attacks in the future.

And yet Israel's acceptance of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) has elicited only a negative response. In fact, Israel finds itself in the ironic position of facing Arab opposition to an Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory. Israel has not asked for a peace treaty with Lebanon in exchange for this withdrawal. Israel has not insisted on the normalization of relations with Lebanon. Israel has sought only one objective: security. But powerful external forces have an interest in the ongoing conflict on the soil of Lebanon. It is no surprise that those who in fact object to an Israeli pull-out have the least interest in the common welfare of the Middle East in general, and of Lebanon in particular.

For Iran, in particular, Hezbollah's war against Israel serves its national interest of penetrating the Arab world, through the radicalization of the Shiite Arab communities in the region. Moreover, by having a spearhead for direct conflict with Israel, through Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iran can elicit the sympathy of Arab States and deflect attention away from its own ambitions of hegemony in the Gulf region.

Iran's support for Hezbollah has been direct. Iranian cargo aircraft regularly land at Damascus International Airport, where they unload large amounts of weaponry, including Sagger anti-tank missiles, long-range Katyusha rockets and high-explosive anti-tank mines. These munitions are then transhipped to the Bekaa Valley and transferred to Hezbollah forces for operations in southern Lebanon or use in international terror operations. The frequency of these Iranian deliveries to Hezbollah, through Syria, have not decreased in any way since the election of President Mohammad Khatami in Iran, on 3 August 1997. Even if the dollar amount of Iranian aid to Hezbollah has declined in the last five years, Hezbollah has managed to more than adequately compensate for this reduction by means of increasing involvement in the Lebanese narcotics trade.

Iran would not be able to back Hezbollah militarily without the complete support of Syria, which has its own separate agenda in the conflict in Lebanon. There is no basis for speculation that an Israeli withdrawal would jeopardize Syria's position in Lebanon. In fact, Israel has not tied its offer to withdraw from Southern Lebanon to the fate of 35,000 Syrian soldiers today deployed throughout the country, even though previous proposals actually linked the fate of all foreign forces in the country. The true reason why Syria supports the status quo in Lebanon is simple: for Syria, Hezbollah's war against Israel is intended to provide negotiating leverage for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967.

Israel cannot accept any linkage between the question of southern Lebanon and any future negotiations with Syria. Whether Israel is engaged in negotiations on the Palestinian track or in negotiations with Syria, Israel will not accept the notion that terrorism — whether direct or by proxy — is a legitimate instrument for advancing positions at the peace table. It is simply untenable to accept a situation whereby every time Israeli and Syrian negotiators hit a possible impasse, Katyusha rockets fly from Lebanon into the Galilee. For peace to succeed, the threat of violence cannot hover over the negotiating table.

Israel is ready to resume negotiations with Syria without preconditions. The foundation of these negotiations lies in the 1991 Madrid Conference invitation, which includes reference to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Resolution 242 (1967) contains fundamental principles, such as secure and recognized boundaries. Israel and Syria must negotiate on where secure and recognized borders are to be situated. The 4 June line between Israel and Syria was neither secure nor recognized. In entering the Golan Heights in June 1967, Israel took control of an area from which it had been repeatedly attacked. This is the basis of Israel's claim to defensible borders.

Moreover, the preambular part of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) emphasizes the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war. Yet the line of 4 June contains territories that were originally part of British Mandatory Palestine — such as the demilitarized zones in Al-Hamma or Banias, and other areas — and these were seized by the Syrian armed forces in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

How can the General Assembly call on Israel to withdraw to a line that grants Syria territories which it acquired by the use of force, contrary to Security Council resolution 242 (1967)? Are we again facing a situation where the resolutions of the General Assembly contradict what has been recommended by the Security Council?

The situation in the Middle East is troubling. The decline in oil revenues across the region and rapidly rising population growth contains a dangerous potential for instability. Hegemonical Powers that seek to project their influence across the Middle East are ready to exploit this potential to advance their interests.

Despite these challenges, Israel is ready to advance the process of peace and reconciliation with its neighbours. The underlying theme in Israel's approach to peace is its insistence on security in all arrangements, whether with Lebanon or in reaching peace with Syria. Security means that terrorism must be dismantled. Security also means that peace arrangements must be structured that can last for generations. For a peace that cannot be defended will not last.

Mr. Effendi (Indonesia): The General Assembly's consideration of the situation in the Middle East at its fifty-third session is taking place at an opportune time. For too long, the region has been beset by conflict and instability. The advent of the next millennium requires the Organization to exert intensified efforts so that the Middle East region can finally move forward on the path to lasting peace and sustainable development.

It has been Indonesia's hope that the peace process launched in Madrid in 1991 will open unprecedented opportunities to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to a peaceful resolution. The Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese leadership have demonstrated not only through words but also through deeds their resolute commitment to achieving a comprehensive peace. On the Palestinian track, after the peace process was deadlocked for almost two years, we welcomed the recent Wye River Memorandum, which finally put the peace process back on track by restoring much-needed momentum. In this regard, its scrupulous implementation is necessary to translate into reality the will and determination of the parties.

While this positive development bodes well for the overall prospects for peace on the Palestinian front, the most formidable obstacle lying in the way is that of settlements, particularly in and around Jerusalem. Actions intended to change the demographic composition of the Holy City and policies of the closure, demolition and confiscation of Arab lands run counter to the spirit and letter of the agreements signed by the parties, and are in violation of all resolutions of international legitimacy. Their immediate termination is essential to promoting trust and confidence.

Nor can there be any justification for the stalemate on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks. Progress on these fronts requires good-faith efforts. If the past history of the region is any indicator, it is the great yearning of the people in the occupied territories to end the violence and turbulence that have engulfed their homelands for decades. Their voices resoundingly call out for peace, justice and security so that they can lead normal lives, pursue development to the fullest extent possible and bring prosperity to themselves and to future generations. The opportunities for achieving a comprehensive peace must be seized. In this regard, it is needless to emphasize that a just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict can only be achieved through the unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories in accordance with relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Finally, the United Nations should continue to play its role and exert its efforts to nurture the peace process. It has a vital stake in enhancing the stability of the Middle East region and a solemn obligation to ensure that a new order of peace, justice and prosperity takes root in those ancient lands.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The situation in the Middle East continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. The Arab-Israeli conflict, of which the question of Palestine is the core, remains without a final solution, although some aspects of the conflict have been resolved. Here we emphasize that the failure thus far to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region is mainly the result of Israeli practices and policies, specifically policies of expansion aimed at acquiring ever more territory by illegitimate means at the expense of the most fundamental rights of the Palestinian people and in violation of the sovereignty of Syria and Lebanon, whose territory is under Israeli occupation.

There is not a single principle of international law and justice that Israel has not violated: the right of peoples to self-determination; the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the territory of others by means of war; the

inadmissibility of the use or threat of use of force; the protection of civilian persons in time of war; the obligation to defend and maintain human rights; the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons; *et cetera*. There is not a single Security Council or General Assembly resolution on the Middle East or on the question of Palestine that Israel has respected or implemented.

But the international community has not yet taken the necessary measures authorized by the Charter and by the principles of international law, not to mention the legal commitments undertaken by States parties to the four Geneva Conventions. We continue to hope that such measures will be taken, not only because of Palestinian and Arab interest, but also because they would help create a just and better balanced world order free of double standards and bias.

Since the peace process began in Madrid, and following the 1993 Declaration of Principles agreed by the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, we all had renewed hope for the speedy achievement of peace in the Middle East and for building a new Middle East with a better future for the peoples of the region. Intermittently, indeed, the peace process made reasonable progress. But regrettably it did not progress in a natural way. On many occasions it seemed frozen, and at other times it appeared to be on the brink on collapse. We would like to affirm here that the only way that will lead to the continuation and success of that process is that of strict adherence to the concluded agreements and to the basis of the peace process, which is anchored in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and in the principle of land for peace. Occupied land must be returned to its rightful owners so that normal relations can be established between States in the region. A Palestinian State with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital must be established in order for comprehensive peace to reign in the Middle East. Continuous progress must be made on the various tracks of the peace process, namely, the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

In the same vein, serious progress must be made in ridding the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. In this connection, the Israeli nuclear facilities must be placed under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Furthermore, Israel should accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, bearing in mind that Israel remains the only State in the Middle East outside the confines of that Treaty.

In the Middle East, as in other regions, terrorism must be confronted in all its forms, including state and internal terrorism in many countries of the region. On our side, we shall do our share in this regard, in accordance with the commitments we have undertaken. At the same time, we affirm the need for all parties to fulfil their obligations, in addition to dealing with the economic, social and political causes of this phenomenon that must be urgently uprooted.

On the occasion of yesterday's donors conference in Washington, we cannot fail to thank the donor countries, particularly those States that have renewed their financial commitments to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian National Authority, including the member States of the European Union, the United States of America, Japan, Norway and our sisterly Arab countries of the Persian Gulf.

Finally, before I conclude, I must again stress the importance of holding a conference of the States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to look into the implementation of the binding provisions of the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, as was confirmed by the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and as this session will once again reaffirm in the coming days.

Mr. Abdullah Ahmad (Malaysia): The item entitled "The situation in the Middle East" has been at the forefront of our agenda ever since it was first considered by the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session, in 1970. Despite numerous efforts by the Organization, as well as other initiatives, the Arab-Israeli conflict seems to be as intractable as ever. The situation in the region continues to be characterized by a climate of tension and unstable security. This fact is indeed regrettable. Until and unless a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached, the situation will continue to be volatile, affecting not only the peace and stability of the region itself, but also international peace and security.

The cumulative effects of the prolonged Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in Palestine, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic have highlighted the intransigence of Israel and its contempt for international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. As is evident from the debate on the question of Palestine in the Assembly yesterday and this morning, there is an international consensus that a comprehensive, just and

lasting peace in the Middle East will not be achieved without the full exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights and the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories.

The international community is gratified at the recent signing of the Wye River Memorandum between the Palestinian leader, President Yasser Arafat, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu. After 18 months of stalemate, the Wye River Memorandum was indeed a welcome breakthrough in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The signing of this interim peace agreement, to be followed by the swift and scrupulous implementation of all its provisions, should go a long way in creating an atmosphere conducive to mutual trust and confidence between the two parties as they prepare for the next crucial step, which is the permanent status negotiations.

Even as we focus on the developments in the central issue of Palestine, there is also a need for us to attach similar importance to other aspects of the Middle East problem, namely, the questions relating to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa, as well as of the Syrian Golan Heights. The continued occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa by Israel is a blatant violation of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. As events of recent weeks have shown, the continued presence of Israeli forces in southern Lebanon continues to be the source of violence and repression. Over the years this has resulted in an alarming number of civilian dead and wounded, severe damage to properties and thousands being displaced from their homes. The Israeli occupation of this area has posed a serious challenge to the Lebanese Government as it grapples with the monumental tasks of rebuilding its economy and strengthening its political stability.

Malaysia reaffirms its continued commitment and consistent support for Lebanon's quest for peace and security and an end to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). We remain seriously concerned over the various acts of violence and hostility perpetrated by the Israeli armed forces in southern Lebanon, including the illegal detention of Lebanese nationals. While recognizing that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has to a certain extent contributed to stability in the area, we believe that peace can only endure if the return of the effective authority of the Lebanese Government in the area is ensured. In this regard, we take note of the decision taken last April by the Israeli Government to accept Security Council resolution 425 (1978). However, it should be emphasized that in accordance with that resolution, Israel's withdrawal from the Lebanese territory should be immediate and without any condition.

My delegation is similarly concerned over the lack of progress in the peace process between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. We had wholeheartedly welcomed the agreement reached in June 1995 between the late Prime Minister Rabin of Israel and President Al-Assad of Syria. The agreement was generally seen as a crucial breakthrough for more effective efforts to move the Syrian-Israeli track to a new and more intensive phase. We believe that maintaining the dialogue between the parties concerned, with the support of the international community, is an important contribution to peace, not only for the two countries but also for the whole Middle East region.

The existence of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan has been a major stumbling block to the Syrian-Israeli peace process. The continued expansion of the settlements in the area represents a significant setback to the efforts to resume peace negotiations and further complicates the implementation of the principle of land for peace. Clearly, the policy of settlement expansion is intended to change the demographic character of the area, which is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Such a policy raises serious questions about Israel's commitment to the peace process. My delegation strongly urges the Israeli Government to abandon this provocative and aggressive policy and desist from building new settlements in the occupied Golan Heights and to fully abide by the provisions of Security Council resolutions 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

Malaysia has consistently called for a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict that would bring peace, security and stability to the region on the basis Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its utmost appreciation to the men and women serving with the UNIFIL peacekeeping mission in Lebanon and with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in the Syrian Arab Republic as well as to the troop-contributing countries. No doubt they have carried out their tasks in a difficult and often dangerous environment. Some of them have made the ultimate

sacrifice for the cause of international peace and security. Our special tribute goes to them.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is now considering the Middle East question. This region is at the forefront of regions on which the attention of the international community is focused and to which considerable international efforts are devoted in order to resolve existing conflicts and ensure regional stability and security for the peoples and States of the region.

Out of persistent concern for the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East, and for the enhancement of security and stability in that region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, since the beginning, has supported the peace process. It participated as an observer at the Madrid Peace Conference and has also actively participated in the multilateral discussions. Saudi Arabia will continue to support the peace process and to bolster it through its international activities and contacts. In this, we have been guided by the principles of the Madrid Conference, particularly the principle of land for peace, as well as by the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Oslo agreements.

Moreover, the Arab States, taking into account the Arab Summit Conference held in Cairo in June 1996, unanimously adopted a firm position whereby the peace option is regarded as an Arab strategic option. This confirms that there will be no Arab backsliding from that definite position. Thus, it is highly regrettable and of great concern, that after the peace process had made its debut in the region, and following the prevalence of an atmosphere of optimism regarding the feasibility of attaining peace, the peace process, which emanated from Madrid on the basis of international legitimacy and the resolutions of the United Nations, as well as from the principle of land for peace, quickly met with successive reverses as a result of acts of the present Israeli Government. That Government has adopted policies that cast off the principles of the peace process adopted at the Madrid Conference, which constitutes reneging on the agreements signed with the Palestinian National Authority. It has also rejected the idea of resuming negotiations with Syria from the point reached in prior negotiations. The Israeli Government has also continued to establish settlements on Palestinians lands in order to change the situation on the ground and establish a new fait accompli. This Government is also continuing its policy of Judaizing Al-Quds al-Sharif by setting up Israeli colonies there and in the surrounding areas with dense Jewish demographics, while emptying them of their Arab inhabitants. It has issued decrees whereby the Jerusalem area was expanded to include neighbouring settlements, thus pre-empting the negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem. It has taken important unilateral decisions that constitute one of the main obstacles to bringing about a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

These Israeli practices have doomed to failure the international community's endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. Thus, the peace process has reached an impasse. Present actions by the Israeli Government do not leave us optimistic about the feasibility of establishing the long-awaited peace for the people of the region, unless these actions are confronted by strict and firm positions taken against Israel to compel it to fully implement the agreements signed with the Palestinians and to respect the fundamentals on which the peace process is based.

While we are pleased with the Israeli-Palestinian agreement recently achieved at Wye Plantation and pay tribute to President Bill Clinton in this regard, and while we hope that this agreement will constitute a step towards putting the peace process back on track, we appeal to the international community, and in particular to the United States, to continue to make every possible effort to end this Israeli absurdity in regard to the most delicate phase of the peace process, namely Jerusalem, Al-Quds al-Sharif. The question of Jerusalem must be treated as the most important issue in the Israeli-Arab conflict. In this regard, we call on Israel to cease taking unilateral measures aimed at prejudicing the outcome of the final status negotiations. Respect for the norms of international law, as well as respect for commitments, is the best way to ensure security and stability. If the present Israeli Government is truly serious in its quest for peace with the Palestinian side, it need only reaffirm its commitment to the provisions of the agreements signed and pursue a solution of the pending problems.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms here the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and the establishment of their own independent State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. If the Israeli Government truly intends to attain a situation of mutual security with its neighbour, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Syrian Arab Government has always declared its readiness to resume negotiations with Israel from the point reached in prior negotiations. It behooves the Israeli side to accept that

Syrian positive initiative aimed at a peaceful and just solution to the conflict.

The end of the conditions of tension and the cycle of violence in southern Lebanon is contingent upon immediate Israeli withdrawal from that area of Lebanon and from Lebanese western Bekaa in implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). We also urge the international community to act effectively in order to bring Israel to abide by its commitments as set out in several agreements.

The Government of Saudi Arabia gives a great deal of its attention to efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East, including the Arab Gulf, through its support for efforts by the League of Arab States, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the League itself at its 101st session. This resolution calls for making this sensitive region of the world free of weapons of mass destruction in all forms, nuclear, chemical and biological. We look forward to the concerted efforts of all the States of the region to achieve this goal in order to ensure stability and security for all, because this will have positive effects on the development of the region.

In this regard, we are deeply concerned to see that Israel rejects acceding to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and remains outside international control in this area, thus presenting a grave threat to the region's security and stability. We reject the policy of double standards that we witness in the international community, which would exclude Israel from efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons from the region, thus encouraging an arms race in that region.

We are deeply convinced of the need to enhance the effectiveness of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons through strengthening the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency and by universalizing this regime. However, we see the necessity of elaborating rules and criteria to promote the desired progress in all areas of disarmament with respect to weapons of mass destruction, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1 (I) of 1946.

We therefore call upon Israel, the only State in the Middle East region which has not acceded to the NPT, to take the necessary measures to do so, and thus subject its nuclear installations to the international safeguards system, which will indeed contribute to bringing about regional and international security and stability.

The time has come for the Middle East to enjoy its share of peace and security and to channel all its energies towards stability, development and prosperity for its peoples. The Middle East is in a position to ensure a life of dignity for all of its inhabitants and to be an oasis of peace, prosperity and creativity, so that the region can once again become one of the main sources of human civilization, as it was in the past.

Mr. Sharma (India): On 30 October 1991, in his opening address on the Middle East Peace process, the Prime Minister of Spain, Felipe González, said,

> "On the eve of 1992, a year full of events, which marked past understandings and misunderstandings, which is pregnant with hope for all, we, as Spaniards, would like to continue to work with you to achieve a peace which can be a lasting one".

The peace process that began in Madrid gave new life to the effort to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, an effort which for many years has been a high priority of the international community. India has had a special interest in the resolution of this conflict. The Middle East is an extended neighbourhood for India and is of strategic, political, cultural and economic importance. Peace and development in the region are of vital concern to India. Peace in the Middle East need not be a dream. Peace is possible. But peace can be achieved only through direct negotiations; it cannot be imposed from the outside.

When the Madrid Middle East peace process was launched, it was envisaged as a process of direct negotiations proceeding along two tracks, one between Israel and the Arab States, and the other between Israel and the Palestinians. Negotiations were to be conducted on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace.

Soon after bilateral talks commenced, parties were to convene also to organize multilateral negotiations which would focus on issues that cross national boundaries and are common to the region: arms control, water, refugee concerns and economic development. Multilateral negotiations were aimed at helping to create an atmosphere in which long-standing bilateral disputes could more easily be settled. Perhaps expectations at the time were too high. The decision of the Arab countries, in particular Syria and Lebanon, to participate in the Middle East peace process was a courageous step. India

welcomed and supported their decision. It was widely expected that the negotiations would not be easy and smooth. Disagreements, criticisms, setbacks and interruptions would be there, but there was also hope that the parties would overcome them.

It is gratifying and to be welcomed that, despite obstacles and delays on the Palestinian track, the peace process has nevertheless remained on course. A major setback has been avoided by the signing of the Wye River Memorandum in Washington on 23 October 1998. We hope that further progress along the lines of the Memorandum will be smooth and that its implementation will facilitate final status negotiations.

However, the Syrian and Lebanese tracks have been stalemated for over two years. We believe that there has to be progress on both tracks if there is to be lasting peace. The region and its people need the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace. During this year's general debate in the General Assembly, we heard the Prime Ministers of Israel and Lebanon and the Foreign Minister of Syria eloquently reaffirming their commitment to peace. Peace is the strategic option they have chosen. We hope, therefore, that negotiations will be resumed from the point at which they stopped on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and will continue to build on commitments and undertakings until a just and comprehensive peace is established in the region.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The United States is proud to have once again worked closely with Russia and Norway on the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process. Our co-sponsors were dedicated and tireless in their efforts to reach agreement on a text supporting the peace process.

The situation regarding the peace process has changed significantly since the last session of the General Assembly. Yesterday, an extremely successful Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development was held in Washington. The Wye River Memorandum is being implemented; the Gaza airport is open; Israel has carried out the first of its further redeployments, as called for in the agreement; and Palestinians and Israelis have begun negotiations on permanent status.

Despite these developments, this body was unable to agree on a positive draft resolution to note the progress made by the parties to date. We find it inexplicable that the General Assembly could not encourage them to continue efforts to reach a just and lasting solution to the problems that still divide them or to express the strong support of the international community for that process.

We believe that the draft resolution entitled "The situation in the Middle East: the Syrian Golan", like others that deal with the long-standing Arab-Israeli dispute, serves only to complicate the achievement of a mutually acceptable outcome. Syria and Israel have committed themselves to a negotiating process to resolve their differences and achieve a lasting peace agreement. As a co-sponsor of the peace process begun in Madrid, the United States is firmly committed to helping the parties resolve their differences. However, we do not believe that draft resolutions such as these are conducive to creating an atmosphere that will help this process succeed.

As has been our practice in the past, the United States will abstain in the voting on the draft resolution concerning Jerusalem. Jerusalem and its future should be decided through permanent status negotiations, as agreed by the parties in their 13 September 1993 Declaration of Principles. This Assembly should not interject itself in this most complex and emotional issue.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is still considering the item on the situation in the Middle East, which was placed on the agenda in consequence of a conflict between the Arab States and Israel that erupted after Israel had usurped Palestinian land, and displaced or expelled the Palestinians from their homeland in 1948. The issue also arose because of the continued Israeli occupation since 1967 of Arab territories. The negative effects of that conflict have impacted all bases for the political and economic stability to which the people of the region have aspired in the past 50 years.

Despite all the significant positive changes that have taken place on the international scene, it is regrettable that the people of our region still live in a situation of war, at times, and of instability at other times, interspersed with periods of foreboding. There have been moments of optimism as well as of pessimism. Kuwait is one State in the region that feels acutely the negative results of a life of no war/no peace. It is a deplorable situation, which regrettably has become characteristic of life in our region today. Our people have begun to feel that they should adapt to and coexist with it.

Kuwait believes that this instability and tension in which the peoples of the region have been living,

particularly in the past few years, are the result of frustration generated by successive Israeli Governments that have adopted colonial and settlerist policies and have tried to thwart the peace process begun on various tracks in Madrid in 1991. This situation has also been the result of the current Israeli Government's flouting of the fundamental principles underlying the peace process and shirking all commitments and undertakings, particularly the agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority in 1993. Moreover, Israel has pursued unilateral arbitrary policies and practices on the ground that run flagrantly counter to the principles on which the Madrid peace process is based. That process still enjoys the support of the Arab States, which insist and adhere to it just as they adhere to the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which are all based on the principle of land for peace.

Kuwait welcomed the agreement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government in late October 1998, signed at Wye River in the United States. This constituted a step towards full implementation of the agreements signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel on the road to a final settlement between the two parties. In this connection, we wish to pay tribute to the role played by the United States of America in advancing the negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. In this connection, we pay tribute to President Bill Clinton, whose efforts culminated in the signing of the memorandum of understanding which we hope will be fully respected so that the peace process will have a chance to move ahead and a swift and comprehensive solution of the Palestinian question can be achieved. This would enable the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination, to return home and to establish their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We believe that successful implementation of the recent memorandum of understanding and the earlier agreements will depend on the goodwill of Israel in implementing these agreements, and its ability to abandon its settlement and expansionist policies in the occupied territories, particularly in the city of Jerusalem. Israel must respect Arab and Muslim sensitivities on these matters by ceasing its practices with regard to extending the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and by abandoning its attempts to change the demographic composition of Jerusalem, with a view to its Judaization. Such practices constitute a flagrant violation of international legitimacy and a blatant contravention of the framework of the Madrid Conference and of all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Kuwait reaffirms today its support for sisterly Syria and Lebanon, and expresses the hope that the United States, in its capacity as co-sponsor of the peace process, will bring the same pressure to bear on Israel as it did recently during the Israeli discussions with the Palestinian Authority with a view to forcing Israel to respect the principles underlying the peace process. This should particularly apply to the land-for-peace principle, the return to negotiations along the Syrian-Lebanese tracks from the point at which they had been previously suspended, and full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Kuwait stills maintains that Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights will be a test of the sincerity of Israel's desire for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace with the Arab States. We also support the position of our brothers in Lebanon in their deep concern at attempts by the Israeli Government to set conditions on the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) regarding Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and its western Bekaa. We reject any interpretation whereby conditions are placed on the implementation of that resolution. We also call on Israel to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon and to stop exploiting its occupation of southern Lebanon by stealing its resources and thwarting its means of development. Kuwait, basing itself on its close link with Lebanon, will continue to support all efforts at development currently under way with a view to reconstructing Lebanon in an era of peace.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm my country's consistent position in favour of advancing the peace process in the Middle East because it is an irreversible strategic option designed to achieve stability and sustainable development, to which all our peoples have aspired for the last 50 years.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): Our discussion on the situation in the Middle East this year is taking place in a relatively promising environment. The signing of the Wye River Memorandum and the implementation of its first phase have reopened the long-stalled peace process.

We congratulate the leaders of Israel and Palestine for their courageous and wise stand, which has made this

breakthrough possible. Those who have inspired, sponsored and supported the Wye River meetings — the United States Administration and President Clinton primarily — also deserve our high praise. It is our sincere expectation that both the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership will remain engaged in the full implementation of the Oslo accords. International, political and economic support to the continuation of this process will be as important as the initial backing it has received. My Government is committed to doing its part in this respect.

The situation in the Middle East and the delicate nature of the peace process require our constant attention. The recent positive developments should not lead the parties and the international community to ignore the existence of the three major obstacles before the peace process: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) remain to be implemented; terrorism, violence and extremism continue to be serious risk factors for peace and stability; and, finally, economic deprivation, unless urgently attended to, could very well undermine diplomatic and political achievements.

There is no doubt that the parties to the peace process still have considerable obligations and responsibilities to fulfil. Discontinuation of the illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, is a priority in this respect. It is regrettable that these illegal and provocative activities have continued in defiance of the strong appeals of the international community and several Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The Wye River process should also inspire the parties of the two other bilateral tracks of the peace process, namely, Israel, Syria and Lebanon. They should be able to resume negotiations on the basis of the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Terrorist activities and threats, sponsored or encouraged by States in some cases, have undermined peace efforts in the past and can do so in the future. Terrorism should be condemned, and every measure should be taken against this threat to peace, stability and security. Parties should also refrain from acts and statements which might incite hatred and violence.

As collateral damage of the impasse in the bilateral tracks of the peace process, the spirit of cooperation which had been developed on the multilateral tracks has unfortunately faded away. There is an urgent need to restore such cooperation. Resumption of multilateral talks on various issues, such as disarmament, economic development, water, environment and refugees, with the full participation of all the parties to the process, remains a major task.

Another adverse consequence of the political impasse has been the discontinuation of the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit meetings. Such meetings are very important and promising forums for designing the future of economic and commercial cooperation in the region. The peace process would be incomplete without such initiatives, which include private sectors along with Government agencies. Necessary political conditions must be created to give a new and fresh impetus to the economic summits and to other similar initiatives. The rebuilding of the multilateral dimension of the peace process must extend to further confidence-building measures and culminate in a new framework for security and cooperation in the region.

Throughout history, the Middle East has contributed immensely to our material and spiritual enrichment, both as individual human beings and as societies. A fertile land for the culture of tolerance, peace and prosperity has turned into the battlefields of the twentieth century. The peoples of the region have been victims of endless wars and conflicts.

The only way to turn this tide is the continuation and successful completion of the peace process. There is no alternative. Both the parties directly involved and the international community must help the Middle East regain its spiritual and material prominence in the international system, which it so deserves.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan fully supports the efforts of the States of the region and the members of the international community to revive and continue the peace process in the Middle East. Kazakhstan, as a major Eurasian State which is making an important contribution to global and regional security, takes a constant interest in the development of the Middle East peace process. My country consistently advocates the implementation by the parties of the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions relating to a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, and firmly supports the positive changes that are taking place in that respect.

The news of the signing, on 23 October this year, of the Wye River Memorandum between the Government of Israel and the Palestine National Authority was

received with profound satisfaction in Kazakhstan. As the report of the Secretary-General on agenda items 39 and 40 (A/53/652) emphasizes, the Memorandum complements and adds details to the accords that the parties concluded in the past and, more importantly, paves the way to permanent status negotiations. We are in agreement with the view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report that the signing of the Memorandum by the parties is a promising development.

The Wye River agreement is regarded in Kazakhstan as an important contribution to the continuation of the peace process. It offers tangible hope for the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East and will facilitate the creation of conditions conducive to the further continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian talks and the ultimate settlement of the Middle East problem.

The leadership of the Republic of Kazakhstan pays tribute to the political far-sightedness and public-spirited courage of Mr. Yasser Arafat and Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, who have achieved such impressive success with the assistance of the United States and the other countries sponsoring the Middle East peace process. Kazakhstan is convinced that the further consolidation of the peace agreements reached between Israel and Palestine and a speedy settlement of the situation in the Middle East are in the interests, in the first place, of the States of the Middle East region, and of the international community as a whole.

Kazakhstan supports the efforts of the participants in the Middle East peace process and considers that the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region is possible only on the basis of peace negotiations, of balancing the interests of all the parties and, above all, of the exercise of the lawful right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State.

We call on all the countries of the region to demonstrate goodwill and wisdom in the search for ways of settling the points at issue, and we believe that there is a need for the parties to continue to abide by the decisions of the Madrid Peace Conference and the fundamental principles set forth in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We are also in agreement with the view that the situation in the Middle East cannot be finally resolved without real progress being made on the Israel-Lebanon track, on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), and on the Israel-Syria track.

Kazakhstan is of the opinion that the participants in the Middle East peace process must abide strictly by their obligations stemming from the agreements signed earlier and refrain from taking unilateral actions that could impair the peace process in the Middle East.

The United Nations has an important role to play in the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East region. Kazakhstan greatly appreciates the recent efforts by the United Nations and the Member States sponsoring the Middle East peace process, which led to the results that have been achieved. In this connection, we also share the gratitude of the parties to the Secretary-General for his objective and detailed reports on the situation in the region and his efforts to promote a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

Kazakhstan expresses its readiness to continue to extend every possible support to the further development of the process of a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, taking into account the interests of all the parties.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): The General Assembly is once again discussing the situation in the Middle East, this year in a specific context characterized both by grounds for hope for the normal continuation of the peace process and by fears of a possible impasse in the negotiating process.

After the historic breakthrough of the Oslo accords, the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the series of arrangements that followed, and after the achievements built up by the Palestinians and the Israelis between 1991 and 1996, the international community was entitled to believe that its dreams of peace were going to come true.

But suddenly, in late 1996, the peace process, conceived of as an irreversible strategic political choice, encountered difficulties. A series of illegal administrative and legislative measures taken by the occupying Power, in violation of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, as well as the numerous obstacles to the implementation of agreements already concluded, began to threaten the building of the peace.

Continual frustrations, denials of basic human rights, frequent blockades of Palestinian territories, the stifling of the Palestinian economy, the constant deterioration in living and working conditions and the unjustified confiscation of Palestinian and Arab lands to build settlements have exasperated the Palestinian and

Arab populations of the occupied territories, who had placed so much hope in the peace of the brave.

With so many obstacles, the peace process ended up being plunged into a relative lethargy, which lasted at least nine months.

This paralysis in the peace process was a source of concern to the entire international community and, more specifically, to the Security Council and the General Assembly, both of which adopted a number of resolutions recommending that measures be taken to save the peace and, above all, to ensure that the occupying Power complied with its commitments.

Several initiatives were launched during this period of lethargy in the peace process in order to bring the negotiations out of deadlock.

Today, we welcome the signing on 23 October 1998 of the Wye River Memorandum, concluded thanks to the courageous and resolute efforts of President Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan. The conclusion of that Memorandum is a positive step in that it has made it possible to unblock the peace process and bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

We are particularly gladdened by this significant progress in the search for a peaceful and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, for, I repeat once again, the Palestinian crisis is indeed at the heart of the Middle East conflict.

We venture to hope that the parties involved will take advantage of this new triumph of — or at least breakthrough towards — peace, and that the measures laid down, as well as the earlier provisions of the Oslo and Washington, D.C., agreements, will be implemented fully and in good faith.

If they do so the parties will dispel the reasons for our fears. They will strengthen our reasons to hope for a normal continuation of the peace process. They will enable the region to experience a new dawn of peace. They will foster secure coexistence for the Israeli, Palestinian and Arab peoples and will stimulate the development of all the economic and cultural potential of the region.

As I have often stated, the region of the Middle East is the crossroads of history and of the world, but too often it has been a theatre of armed conflict. Too often it has seen bloodshed. Now it must live in peace, and to accomplish that it is essential that the crises that afflict it be settled peacefully and with respect for the rights and the dignity of the peoples that make up the region.

Neither provocative measures nor the daily frustrations of Arab populations, nor the establishment of settlements in Jerusalem or elsewhere, nor imprisonment, nor any form of deprivation can ensure the security of the populations of the region. Only peace can bring security for all, and only security can, in turn, maintain peace.

The international community has often recalled that establishing settlements in East Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories must be halted, along with illegal measures and the policy of fait accompli, because they jeopardize future negotiations on the final status.

The international community has on many occasions recommended that an urgent solution be found for returning the Syrian Golan and for withdrawing Israeli forces from Lebanese territory, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

My delegation believes that it is time to establish the conditions for starting negotiations on the final status so as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise in peace their right to self-determination and independence and to regain their dignity, in accordance with international legitimacy.

The United Nations, together with the sponsors of the peace process and the European Union could make a major contribution to fostering a climate of trust and measures of trust between the parties so that the various negotiations among the various protagonists involved can continue and lead swiftly to a lasting, peaceful political settlement.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: In my statement before the General Assembly this morning I dealt with Egypt's perspective on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track. I also referred to Egypt's views concerning the illegal measures taken by Israel with the aim of pre-empting the final status negotiations and voiding them of all content.

Egypt considers that the question of Palestine is at the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that peace will not be achieved between the Arab States and Israel until

after a just and lasting settlement of this central issue has been attained.

In dealing with the item on the situation in the Middle East, Egypt believes that the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the region comprises a number of elements of equal importance, namely, the complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, the establishment of normal relations between the Arab States and Israel and the framing of mutual security arrangements. These are the bases which must be taken into account. Until an equation that takes into account all these elements is arrived at, the Israeli side must refrain from taking any measures that contravene international law and United Nations resolutions.

Arab participation in the 1991 Madrid Conference was founded on acceptance of negotiations on the basis of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which is in turn based on the principle of land for peace. This is the pivot of the peace process involving Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.

Turning to the Syrian track, the current Israeli Government refuses to recognize the progress that had been made in negotiations between Syria and the previous Israeli Government. This gives rise to grave doubt about the Israeli Government's intentions with respect to ending its occupation of the Syrian Golan and reaching a genuine peace with Syria on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Here I wish to reaffirm Egypt's position, which is in full support of Syria's right to regain the Golan in its entirety; this is the only way to bring about peace between Syria and Israel.

On the Lebanese track, Egypt has followed with great concern all that has taken place in occupied southern Lebanon, including the events of the last few days. In this context, I reaffirm Egypt's position in support of Lebanon's insistence that Israel fully implement Security Council 425 (1978). Egypt is convinced that Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon would build confidence, reduce tension and create greater stability; it would indeed be a prelude to peace between Lebanon and Israel.

Egypt sees a link between progress on the various bilateral negotiating tracks on the one hand and the numerous forms of regional cooperation on the other. The orientation of the Middle East towards peace is an indivisible whole. Relations of cooperation between the Arab States and Israel, whether economic or otherwise, can neither be established nor develop with the peace process in its present situation and with Israel's continued intransigence and its persistent refusal to end its occupation of Arab territories.

Egypt hopes for genuine positive developments in the peace process that could herald regional cooperation based on the solid foundation of the needs of the States of the region themselves, not on something imposed from outside. Thus, there is an organic and unbreakable link between the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the one hand and the promotion of joint regional economic cooperation benefitting all the States of the region without discrimination on the other.

Egypt believes that the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace would be the true basis for the establishment of security in its broadest sense for all the parties in the Middle East.

On that basis, Egypt continues to call for a Middle East free from nuclear weapons. That initiative began in the General Assembly in 1974; the Assembly has adopted resolutions on that subject annually since 1980. Since 1990, and in the framework of an initiative by President Mubarak, Egypt has been calling for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. Here I would note Israel's persistent refusal to enter into any arrangement or to take any step that would help build confidence: it rejects the inspection of its nuclear facilities. This adds to the political tension in a region where heightened tension already prevails.

In order to establish peace in the Middle East, mighty efforts must be made by the States of the region and by peace-loving States outside the region. In that connection, Egypt would like to state its appreciation for the role played by the United States, the members of the European Union, the Russian Federation and Norway to revive and restore the peace process.

The Arab States have chosen peace as their strategic option since the Arab Summit held in Egypt in 1996. That choice remains in place.

In conclusion, I reaffirm that the establishment of a just peace requires that Israel too adopt an outlook focused on the benefits that could be derived from peace. This requires faith in the feasibility of peace, so that the region will never return to the confrontation and tension that prevailed in an earlier stage that we had hoped would by now be ended.

Mr. Mubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Lebanon has suffered more than any other State as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In our view, we have much to gain from the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, a peace we seek for the region on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). My delegation reiterates Lebanon's sincere commitment to the peace process that began at Madrid in 1991. We accepted the initiative of the co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States of America and the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

But for 20 years Israel has been refusing to implement that resolution. It continues to occupy parts of southern Lebanon and to launch daily attacks against innocent civilians. Lebanon has consistently called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and calls upon Israel unconditionally to withdraw from Lebanon to the internationally recognized boundaries.

Let me make it clear once again that Lebanon categorically rejects any "new" old offer that would split the Lebanese and Syrian negotiating tracks. We stress our absolute rejection of rumours in the media concerning questionable "Lebanon first" plans that would reproduce the agreement of 17 May 1983, which we have rejected both in spirit and in letter. We insist on full solidarity and strict coordination between ourselves and Syria on our common negotiating process. It is no secret that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks are of strategic importance for the success of the peace talks. If that basic fact is ignored, the situation will continue to deteriorate. There will be no peace in the region so long as Israel shirks its duty to commit itself to international law and the Madrid principles, specifically the principle of land for peace, and the consequent withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, including unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon to the internationally recognized boundaries in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), as well as withdrawal from the Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon since 1978 has brought destruction and tragedy to my country. Neither the 1978 invasion, known at the time as Operation Litani, nor the 1982 invasion, known as Operation Peace for Galilee, has brought Israel security. Indeed, occupation has created more complications, in addition to massive suffering. The violence in southern Lebanon reaffirms the complete failure of the concept of the so-called security zone created by Israel. Furthermore, the many raids carried out daily by Israel north of the security zone also reaffirm beyond doubt the failure of that concept.

Everyone no doubt remembers the aggression perpetrated by Israel against Lebanon in June 1996 under the code name Grapes of Wrath. Those "grapes" reached dozens of villages in the south, as well as many infrastructures deep in Lebanese territory. Everyone must have seen on their television screens pictures of villages totally razed to the ground. With their own eyes everyone saw tens of thousands of innocent civilians fleeing the bombs lobbed and the missiles launched by aircraft, warships and tanks, sparing nothing and no one. They followed and attacked civilian vehicles running in all directions. International public opinion was shocked when it saw the bombing of an ambulance carrying children, homes destroyed over the heads of their inhabitants and innocent people buried alive under the rubble. The world's conscience was shaken when Israeli artillery hit the United Nations headquarters in Qana and the limbs of 110 civilians were strewn in all directions, most of them belonging to women and children who had sought refuge there, thinking that they would be safe from Israel's "grapes of destruction" under the protection of those who watched over international peace and security.

Everyone remembers the General Assembly's condemnation of Israeli aggression against Lebanon. Nevertheless, Israel continues to ignore the will of the international community, which demands its unconditional withdrawal from Lebanese territory. Israel continues to threaten again our infrastructures and to plunge Beirut into darkness and thirst. It does not shy away from stealing the soil from our farms or from accusing those who resist its occupation soldiers, armed with guns, tanks and other equipment, of being terrorists.

The Commission on Human Rights, which has adopted many resolutions relating to human rights issues in southern Lebanon, has clearly reaffirmed that Israel is violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and the Hague Rules of 1907. Lebanese detainees in detention camps administered by Israel in southern Lebanon — particularly the Al-Khiam detention camp — continue to suffer from arbitrary detention. We once again renew our demand for their immediate release.

The grapes of wrath fell, and Israeli practices thereafter led to the dropping off of the last fig leaf. Israel is now completely naked in its flagrant and constant violation of all moral values and of international law. The extent of Israel's aggressive intentions and the depth of its hatred towards the inhabitants of the region have been revealed. Israel does not yet comprehend that the policy of fire and steel will not establish peace. We have repeatedly stated publicly and in the Security Council that this policy will only lead to destruction and death and that its perpetrators will only be shamed and brought down. Once more, we reaffirm the need to implement resolution 425 (1978), which alone can guarantee the return of tranquility and stability to southern Lebanon. We also reaffirm the right of our people to resist Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and in the western Bekaa. That right is based on international law and resolutions of international legitimacy, as well as dozens of declarations made by international forums — including the Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, which had the blessing of over 130 heads of State or Government. Our people are exercising their natural right to free their land from the stigma of Israeli occupation, which, under international law, is indeed the ugliest form of terrorist practice.

The Israeli Government continues to say "no" to the Madrid principles, "no" to land for peace, "no" to returning to the negotiating table from the point where negotiations with the previous Israeli Government were suspended, and "no" the implementation of commitments it has already made. It does, however, say "yes" to the building of dozens of new settlements in the West Bank and the Golan Heights, "yes" to the expansion of dozens of existing settlements, "yes" to the confiscation of more land belonging to the Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories, "yes" to the stifling of the Arab identity of Jerusalem, and "yes" to further threats, muscle-flexing and escalation of tension.

This is an irresponsible Government based on the language of violence, escalation, settlerism, expansion and the rejection of the principles of settlement and of the language of peace and conciliation. We have new evidence on a daily basis of Israel's threats and arbitrary practices, as well as its endless violations of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 — particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention — and the principles of international law.

We must once again repeat that multilateral negotiations will not succeed as long as Israel does not withdraw from occupied Arab land. All these ceremonial occasions, which give the impression that the peace process is in progress, are to no avail as long as Israel refuses to heed international law and the bases of the Madrid process. We are fully convinced that the multilateral talks that have taken place to date are premature. They will not bear fruit, as long as the bilateral tracks do not bring about the results that are desired and that are required by international law and the Madrid principles.

Secondly, we believe that the Security Council is the primary international body mandated with defending States from aggression and ensuring that its resolutions are followed up until they are implemented. The role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is central and essential to the implementation of resolution 425 (1978). We therefore renew the call for the maintenance of the size and effectiveness of the Force, especially in the light of the important role required of it in this regard. We take this opportunity to thank UNIFIL for all the sacrifices it has made since 1978. We would also like to express our deep appreciation to the States that contribute to UNIFIL.

Thirdly, I would like to renew Lebanon's commitment to the Palestinian people's attainment of their legitimate national aspirations, as well as their right to self-determination and to their own State. We call for the full implementation of resolution 194 (III), which clearly and unambiguously reaffirms the right of Palestinians to return to their homes.

Lebanon categorically rejects any attempts to settle permanently in Lebanon any Palestinians who are currently on its territory. This firm position has been made concrete in the Lebanese Constitution, in accordance with the Taif Agreement of 1989. It also represents the national consensus of the Lebanese people.

As to Jerusalem, we reaffirm that Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction, and administration over the city of Al-Quds al-Sharif — Jerusalem — is an illegal decision, and thus is null and void, and has no legitimacy whatsoever. Many resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly reaffirming this fact, including Security Council resolutions 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 271 (1969), 298(1971) and 476 (1975). We look to those who continue to regard the issue from an objective point of view and who state that Jerusalem is at the very core of the Palestinian question. We cannot accept any measures that detract from the character of this Holy City, a city where Arab inhabitants

are subjected to many pressures to leave their city in an attempt to change the demographic status and social situation there.

We would also like to draw attention to the danger of the many continuing archaeological activities threatening the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other major sites of importance to Muslims and Christians in the city. We also denounce the fact that some States have transferred their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980), the provisions of which they refuse to abide by. We call upon those States to commit to the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions in accordance with the Charter of the Organization.

As for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it will have no effect whatsoever in the region as long as Israel refuses to adhere to the Treaty and as long as Israel continues to threaten the region with its nuclear arsenal, in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and specialized agencies. Israel must heed the will of the international community as provided for in international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. Only this will guarantee a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region.

Peace and prosperity are all we ask for. However, we ask for it to be based on the Madrid principles and international legitimacy as well as the principle of land for peace. Lebanon has suffered from a war that continued for several years and ended only eight years ago. We aspire to reconstruct our country and to give our children a better future. This will not be possible as long as peace in the region is not durable, just and comprehensive, and as long as this peace is not based on the principles of international law and the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.

The regrettable current condition of the peace process which we are witnessing today will continue so long as Israel continues to treat the process in such an irresponsible fashion. Israel will continue to undermine this process, which will have grave repercussions, not only for the parties but, indeed, for the entire international community.

The time has come for Israel to be made to understand that there will be no peace without the full restitution of the land. We call on the sponsors of the peace process to set things moving in the right direction before it is too late.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Unlike one year ago, today we can say that there has been a change of expectations with respect to the peace process in the Middle East, and there is now reason to be moderately optimistic.

The parties seem to have come together again and — not without effort and certainly thanks to the required reciprocal concessions — to have found the way to a negotiated solution to the Palestinian issue. We believe that the Wye River Memorandum, signed 23 October 1998, provides new and vital impetus to the peace process and is an important generator of trust between the parties. This document shows further that when there is a genuine will to negotiate and an openness to compromise it is always possible to reach an understanding.

We are aware that important issues remain to be resolved. Therefore, we ask the parties to persevere on the path they have once again chosen to travel together, beginning with the Wye River Memorandum; to continue to reinforce through concrete acts the climate of mutual trust necessary to the success of all negotiations; and to firmly resist the provocations of extremists on either side who are trying to bring about a collapse of the peace process that was begun in Madrid in 1991.

We wish to repeat once again our firm conviction that there are no alternatives to peace in the Middle East. The comprehensive implementation in good faith of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1967) and 425 (1978) and the Oslo agreements will allow talks to begin as soon as possible on the delicate questions regarding final status.

Therefore, we urge the parties to refrain from any and all acts that prejudge the final status of the territories. Accordingly, we feel that the building of settlements in the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem, is a unilateral measure that is contrary to international law and that affects the results of the negotiations. For this reason we urge that these measures be reconsidered, taking into account their negative effects in the light of Israel's basic and permanent interest in living in peace with its neighbours.

At the same time, Argentina unequivocally condemns all acts of violence — acts that have claimed numerous victims among the civilian population. Terrorism is never an effective or acceptable response. The use of terrorism endangers the continuation of the

peace process. Argentina wishes to reiterate clearly and emphatically the right of the State of Israel to live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, without being subjected to acts or threats of acts of violence.

The bilateral negotiations are the engine for the peace process. Accordingly, we wish to express our deepest appreciation to President Clinton of the United States of America and to his Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, for their work this past October to rescue the negotiations from as they were going through one of their most delicate phases.

Though bilateral negotiation is absolutely essential, the United Nations has a special historical responsibility to Palestine — a responsibility that has manifested itself over the course of 50 years in the establishment of peacekeeping operations, in uninterrupted assistance to the Palestinian refugees and in the personal commitment to peace of its Secretaries-General.

Argentina understands that peace and development are inseparable elements. Faithful to this concept, we have participated from the outset in peacekeeping operations, and, more recently, through the "White Helmets" initiative, we have cooperated on specific programmes for human development on the West Bank and in Gaza.

The comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region demanded by the resolutions of the Security Council and of this Assembly will not be realized unless there is sustained and concurrent progress on all the tracks of the peace process. Therefore, we cannot hide our concern at the lack of dialogue between Syria and Israel regarding the Golan Heights. We urge both parties to resume this dialogue in a frank manner and a constructive spirit.

Regrettably, the situation in southern Lebanon also remains unresolved. Argentina wishes to reconfirm its commitment to the territorial integrity, political independence and full sovereignty of Lebanon and to reiterate the need to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) effectively.

I would like to conclude by asking the parties to take advantage of this new opportunity for peace, to continue on the path set out in Madrid in 1991 and confirmed at Wye Plantation in 1998. This is the path of law, understanding and respect for each other's existence. In short, it is the path of genuine reconciliation between peoples.

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan)(*interpretation from Arabic*): The question of the Middle East, at the core of which is the question of Palestine, remains an important item on the agenda of this Organization. Despite the progress made on the Palestinian-Israeli track with the signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998, and despite the beginning of the implementation of some of the elements of the Wye agreement, which we consider to be an important, positive development that will put the peace process back on the right track after a stalemate that lasted nearly two years, it is our hope that even more achievements will be made on the road to peace. It is also our hope that we will draw closer to peace seven years after the beginning of the process at Madrid.

His Majesty King Hussein left his hospital treatment programme under extremely delicate circumstances to go to Wye Plantation and to contribute for two consecutive days to the efforts made to arrive at an agreement. These noble and sincere efforts of His Majesty made a clear contribution to the settlement of acute differences and to overcoming the grave obstacles that remained for a number of days and nights, after which agreement was reached. All the participating parties have testified to the importance and the effectiveness of the efforts made by His Majesty. This bears testimony to the commitment of the King, the leadership and the people of Jordan to continue to work for the establishment of the desired peace in all parts of our region. It gives me pleasure to express my thanks to the delegations of the friendly and sisterly countries that expressed their appreciation in their statements before the General Assembly for the role played by His Majesty King Hussein for the success of these talks.

By participating in the debate on this item, my delegation reaffirms its belief in the role of the United Nations and its clear responsibilities for the peace process, as well as in the need to reinvigorate its role in supporting and complementing the efforts currently being made to free the peace process from the stalemate which has impeded its progress. The United Nations is the true foundation of international legitimacy. It is the one body that adopts firm resolutions concerning international conflicts and questions. It is the one organ that firmly and determinedly imposes on its Members compliance with its will and implementation of its resolutions. The peace process is based on United Nations resolutions, and Security Council resolution 242 (1967) is the very foundation of that process, whereby the door to peace was opened in 1967. With its implementation in letter and

spirit, we will arrive at the desired peace. However, that resolution and others adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly have yet to be implemented by Israel, despite the adoptions and reaffirmations in every session of this Assembly over dozens of years.

The question of peace in the Middle East is the highest of Jordan's concerns. Our contribution to peaceful action to settle this question has been well known since 1948. In international relations, Jordan has adopted an approach that stems from the spirit of the Charter, and it believes in peaceful settlement of all international problems under all circumstances and at all times. On more than one occasion before this Assembly, we have reaffirmed that Jordan understands peace as being just, lasting and comprehensive. This is the same understanding shared by the majority of international parties, particularly those directly concerned with the question of the Middle East. Our commitment to peace within this understanding is a strategic commitment, based on our conviction that peace represents a basic need for all the States and peoples of the region. When that peace is achieved, it will constitute a radical turning point in the history of the region. It will constitute a way towards new horizons that augur well for the countries and the peoples of the region and will promise them stability, security and peaceful coexistence — indeed, the normal life of which they have been deprived for almost six decades.

Therefore, in the autumn of 1994, Jordan signed a Treaty of Peace with Israel on the basis of our belief that it would steer matters onto the right track, that it would turn over a new leaf of relations of good neighbourliness between the two countries and that it would establish the principles and the bases of cooperation and interaction in various fields. In Jordan, we took a keen interest in opening the door to peace without reservation and without rejecting any of the aspects of full, normal relations, so that the Israeli-Jordanian peace would be an example to be followed. We also did this so that the position of Jordan would be a model of commitment to the provisions of agreements and their implementation in letter and in spirit, their translation into a tangible reality. This was done in order to assure our neighbours in Israel that peace is neither a document that we sign as an end in itself nor a means of consolidating the causes of conflict or the gains of war. In fact, peace, as we understand it, is a reality, a practice, interaction and cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, honouring commitments and acting faithfully and responsibly to implement them.

There was great hope that this Treaty would be followed by progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with Israel in order to achieve comprehensiveness and to start the process of economic and developmental reconstruction in the region as a whole. Unfortunately, this has so far not been achieved, for very well-known reasons, the clearest of which is that the basic principles on which the peace process are based, such as the principle of land for peace, have not been implemented. The Arab territories continue to languish under the yoke of occupation, and the international agreements and resolutions achieved have not yet been implemented.

At the end of the discussion on this item last year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/52. Paragraph 3 of that resolution stressed the necessity of commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, as well as the need for the immediate and meticulous implementation of the agreements reached between the two parties. The resolution enjoyed the support of an overwhelming majority, thus reaffirming the Assembly's conviction of the need to implement these principles. In the same resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed the illegality of the Israeli settlements established in the territories occupied since 1967, as well as the illegality of the Israeli measures aimed at altering the status of Jerusalem.

We wonder if any part of these provisions has been implemented. The painful reality is that matters continue to go in the opposite direction. The report of the Secretary-General dated 10 November 1998 (A/53/652) contained a note verbale addressed to him on 9 October 1998 by the Permanent Observer of Palestine, which refers to the continued illegal activities of Israel in the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

Yesterday, Ambassador John de Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, told us during the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, that conditions in the occupied territories have not improved, as had been hoped, and that fear, hopelessness and frustration have taken hold.

Among the pretexts used by Israel to justify its actions is the issue of security. The issue of security, which has been raised by Israel, is of understandable concern. In fact, it is one of the most important

objectives of the peace that we strive to achieve for all States and peoples in the region. It cannot be achieved, however, through the failure to implement the agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinians, nor by escalating practices denying the Palestinians their rights and dashing their hopes. Security cannot be achieved through continued Israeli settlement in the occupied Arab territories, be it by expanding the existing settlements or by constructing new ones. In either case, the result is the same. Security cannot be achieved by pursuing a policy of confiscating land, demolishing Arab homes, withdrawing identity cards, isolating Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, restricting the freedom of movement of the Palestinians and keeping thousands in detention camps nor by allowing the Israeli security forces to use physical violence, tantamount to torture during the investigation of the accused. Such behaviour violates the most basic rules of respect for human rights and justice, and the civilized world resolutely rejects and condemns it.

The peace we aim to achieve is one that is just, lasting and comprehensive. How can it be achieved if the territory is not returned to its legitimate owners? How can the land be returned if settlement and the creation of new facts on the ground continue? How can we be convinced that such peace is Israel's ultimate objective when it issues official declarations reaffirming the continued policy of settling the occupied Arab territories and calling on the settlers to occupy the Arab territories to prevent their restoration to their Palestinian owners? These declarations have had an extremely negative impact on the climate of confidence that we have worked to create for the attainment of a peace that would enable the peoples of the region to heal the wounds and transcend the tragedies of the past and to move towards a future of cooperation, reconciliation, harmony and hope. Peace can be achieved not by consolidating the causes of conflict, but by eliminating them. It cannot be achieved by seizing land, expanding settlements, or denying the rights of the other party. It can be achieved only through justice. Justice is the basis of peace and peace is the basis of security.

The Israeli-Palestinian accords of 1993 deferred certain questions — such as settlements, Jerusalem and refugees — to the final status negotiations. It is therefore natural and axiomatic to leave those matters deferred and untouched. The deferral must not be tampered with pending the date agreed upon for negotiation. It cannot be exploited as an opportunity to change facts on the ground in favour of the occupier, thus making a solution more difficult, more complex, and even more impossible to achieve. We believe that the deferral of the negotiations on these important matters, which are at the core of the conflict, should not allow them to be overlooked or denied an appropriate, just and acceptable solution. Anyone who hopes that it will is mistaken, because any problem that remains unsolved will be a source of rekindling conflict and voiding previous achievements. Serious solutions are those that do not ignore the rights of others in the hope that they will disappear with the passage of time.

It is high time for all deferred matters to be placed on the agenda of the negotiations and to be addressed in a spirit of earnest and objectivity and with the true will to find appropriate legal, just and acceptable solutions that would, in turn, make peace an acceptable option, protected and nurtured by the peoples of the region. We believe that this is the right path to peace and that the solution to such deferred problems as the question of refugees, Jerusalem, the sovereignty and the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people and the establishment of their own State, with its capital in Jerusalem, is the only guarantee of security, stability, progress and prosperity for all the peoples and countries of the region, Arab and Israeli alike.

The need for a comprehensive solution makes it necessary to resume the negotiations on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks at the point at which they stopped in order to achieve the necessary settlement on the basis of the Madrid framework, the principle of land for peace, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Progress towards and the achievement of peace are the surest ways to rein in extremism and violence and to establish safety and security.

The question of Jerusalem is one of the cores of the peace process. It is inevitable that a just solution to it will be found. There is a consensus at all international, legal and political levels that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the West Bank, occupied in 1967. It is therefore subject to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of the Security Council's resolutions. The Security Council has accorded the city of Jerusalem special attention since the Israeli occupation began and has adopted a number of resolutions rejecting all Israeli legislation and measures aimed at altering the character of the Holy City and any other act to alter its geographic or demographic character.

On this basis, any measure that Israel has taken since the beginning of the Madrid process or will take to alter the demographic, political or legal status of

Jerusalem would be tantamount to creating a fait accompli and new facts on the ground to be imposed on the Arab side in the final status negotiations. This is unacceptable. In that context, and with a view to maintaining the historic, cultural and religious character of the Holy City, the Government of Jordan is keenly maintaining its protection of the holy places under the occupation so that they may continue to be immune to all prevailing threats in the region while they await the desired final solution. The city of Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the three monotheistic religions. We therefore wish it to remain a noble symbol of coexistence and peace. The end of the occupation of the Arab part of the Holy City cannot entail a redivision of the city or the building of walls through its centre. It implies only the prevalence of justice and right in the city.

Before concluding, I would express my regret at the distortions of history retailed in the statement made by the Israeli representative yesterday when he described as annexation the voluntary unity, endorsed by an elected Parliament, of the two brotherly peoples of Jordan and Palestine in 1950. I wonder why such distortions of history should be necessary at a time when we believe that we must eschew and transcend the language of provocation, to enter into an era of peace. We believe that the United Nations, the embodiment of international legitimacy, has a vital role to play in promoting the peace process on the basis of General Assembly resolution 52/52. We believe that the European Union must pursue its efforts to complement those of the co-sponsors of the peace process, so that all the hard work done in every field by people of goodwill may support the process and meet the requirements of success. From the outset, the members of the European Union have made a particular contribution to the efforts for peace and continue to contribute to the economic development process.

My country looks forward to a wider and deeper understanding by the international community of the development and economic needs of the peoples and countries of the region, which have laid the foundation of peace. They cannot consider it abstractly, but must address it through concrete benefits.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus)(*interpretation from Russian*): The question of the situation in the Middle East has been before the United Nations since its founding more than 50 years ago. Unfortunately, its importance and timeliness for the peoples of the region and for all humankind has not lessened. Since the founding of our Organization, the Republic of Belarus has been deeply interested in a swift, peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict on the basis of principles of international law, including the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Belarus was very pleased to learn of the signing on 23 October 1998 by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, of the Wye River Memorandum and the accompanying documents. We view this agreement as a significant breakthrough in efforts to implement agreements previously achieved between the parties and to resume the peace process in the Middle East.

For the past year and a half, the international community, including our Republic, has followed with great concern the growing difficulties that have complicated the gradual development of Palestinian and Israeli dialogue. The prolonged lack of progress towards a peaceful settlement seen until recently has given rise to great tension in the region, as well as to disappointment and despair among the Palestinian population. The deterioration of the economic situation of the Palestinians, including the continuing fall in their living standards resulting from stagnation in the peace process, is a significant negative factor that has worsened an already critical situation. It seemed that the region could again be plunged into a whirlpool of unforeseen events, fraught with the danger of disrupting the peace process. In this context, the Wye River Memorandum, despite its temporary nature and the need for additional measures for a final settlement, is an extraordinarily important, timely step towards peace.

Giving new impetus to the settlement process begun in Madrid and consolidated in Oslo, the recent agreement should re-establish an atmosphere of mutual trust between the parties and restore hope for peace, stability and security in the Middle East. The compromise achieved at Wye Plantation is a clear reaffirmation of our firm conviction that even the most difficult conflicts between parties can be resolved only by peaceful, political means. Belarus hopes that the goodwill demonstrated by the signing of the Wye Memorandum will be given form in the scrupulous, timely implementation by both parties of their obligations, in strict compliance with the terms agreed on, without any reservations or additional conditions.

In this connection, we are encouraged by the troop redeployment from the West Bank and the recent opening of the international airport at Gaza, as well as the recent release of some 250 Palestinian prisoners and the start on 18 November of Palestinian and Israeli final status negotiations. Despite these important events, the Palestinians and Israelis have much to do for the practical realization of the Wye agreement and we sincerely hope they will be successful.

The parties must fully demonstrate complete political commitment to their undertakings and readiness to firmly resist the extremist forces that are attempting to make progress towards genuine peace impossible. In this context, we unreservedly condemn terrorism and political extremism in all their forms. We must not allow the opponents of the peace process to block a timely implementation of the Wye Memorandum, which would jeopardize prospects for a definitive settlement. We commend the firm measures taken by the Palestinian Authority to stop the activities of extremist organizations in the territories under their control, measures which reflect the Palestinians' genuine dedication to the implementation of their obligations.

While it is very important to strengthen trust and establish cooperation between the parties, Belarus stresses the inadmissibility of any unilateral steps to predetermine the outcome of negotiations on final status, which would create tensions in this context. We are concerned with the continuation of the Israeli practice of building settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip and with the decision taken in June 1998 to extend Jerusalem's municipal boundaries. Belarus sees these steps as unconstructive and not conducive to trust and relaxation of tensions between the parties. On the basis of the assumption that lasting economic development is a guarantee for social political stability in the Middle East, primarily among the Palestinian population, we feel it necessary that intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations continue and increase their activities to lend economic support to the Palestinians to facilitate the settlement of this difficult situation as soon as possible.

In this connection, we greatly commend the selfless work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, despite its serious financial crisis, continues to give social and economic assistance to the Palestinian refugees. We also note the important role of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories in coordinating and making available to the Palestinian people diverse forms of assistance through the various bodies of the United Nations system. Belarus also expresses the hope that the Ministerial Conference of donor countries taking place in Washington as of 30 November 1998 to support the Middle East peace process will achieve concrete results to help the economic situation of the Palestinians.

In the context of the recent signing of the Wye River Memorandum, the Republic of Belarus has great hopes that success in the Palestinian and Israeli talks will create the necessary conditions to resume the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the dialogue. Without significant progress in this area, genuine peace in the Middle East is not possible.

In conclusion, allow us to reaffirm our Republic's deep dedication to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, based on the terms of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the land-for-peace formula and on respect for the rights of all States in the region to live in peace within secure internationally recognized borders. We are confident that the final outcome of the settlement will be the attainment by the Palestinian people of its legal rights to self-determination and independence. Belarus, for its part, is ready to make all possible international efforts and to support all United Nations measures aimed at achieving durable peace in the region. As was stressed by the Prime Minister of Belarus, Mr. Syargei Ling, in his message of 30 November 1998 on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we believe there is no alternative to a just and comprehensive peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Sindi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Republic of Yemen attaches great importance to the development of the situation in the Middle East. We have always strongly supported the peace process. The process that began at the Madrid Conference in 1991 was aimed at bringing about a comprehensive and just settlement on the basis of the principle of land for peace and of the resolutions adopted by the international community, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and all of the agreements that ensued, which reconfirmed the need to have a comprehensive, just and lasting peace as a basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region. The objective was to eradicate violence, eliminate extremism and strengthen the foundations for peaceful coexistence.

The Republic of Yemen welcomes the efforts made by the United States of America as a sponsor of the

peace process, which helped lead to the signing of the Wye River Memorandum in October by President Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in the presence of President Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan. My country, which called on Israel to respect and comply with that agreement, is disturbed to see that Israel is creating obstacles and continuing with its declarations regarding the construction of settlements. Indeed, at the very moment when it was signing the agreement, it was calling for bids for the building of settlements in part of occupied East Jerusalem, at Jebel Abu-Ghneim. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of achieving a comprehensive solution, leading to the Palestinian people's enjoyment of their legitimate rights, especially the right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State, with its capital at Al-Quds al-Sharif.

While appreciating the efforts made by the United States of America to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, the Republic of Yemen would like to stress here the need for that country to make tireless efforts in order to ensure that negotiations resume on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks from where they left off. We appeal to that sponsor of the peace process — indeed, to both sponsors of the peace process — to urge the Israeli Government to agree in earnest to the resumption of the peace process and to prepare for complete withdrawal from the Syrian Golan, southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa.

The implementation of the principles of legally binding international agreements with regard to, *inter alia*, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the principle of land for peace — a principle enshrined in international resolutions, at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo agreements — would lead to stability and prosperity in the Middle East and would strengthen the new values of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation.

Any lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East must be accompanied by efforts to free the region from all weapons of mass destruction. There must be verification and commitment. In this context, I should like to refer to paragraph 7 of resolution 46/30, which calls on the Secretary-General to continue consultations with States in the region and other interested States with a view to taking measures and working for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

I should also like to take this opportunity to state that the Republic of Yemen has already ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was signed by the Prime Minister of my country. We hope that that Treaty will also be signed by all States in the region without exception. We hope that dialogue, understanding and peaceful coexistence among the countries of the region will prevail over the arms race.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The General Assembly is again considering the situation in the Middle East, one of the most complex and long-standing problems of our time. The international community has been anxiously following developments in the region over the past year, noting with hope any positive shifts and reacting with concern and distress to outbreaks of tension and confrontation. As a sponsor of the Middle East peace process, Russia has always worked for the swift resumption of negotiations on all Arab-Israeli tracks without exception, and in particular for the achievement of real progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

The Russian approach is based on the fundamental elements of the peace process, primarily the Madrid formula, which is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. We are pleased to note the beginnings of a thaw in the Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. Moscow welcomes the practical implementation of the Wye River Memorandum between Palestine and Israel allowing for the resumption of the implementation of measures in the transitional period in the Palestinian territories and of negotiations on final status. The agreement is aimed at broadening Palestinian self-rule, ensuring security in Palestinian-Israeli relations and resolving problems that are vitally important to Palestinians, Israelis and the entire region. We note the special role played by the United States as a sponsor in working out the compromise. The Russian side was also active in trying to bring the sides closer together, and an important contribution was made by the European Union.

It would be logical to reflect this dynamic in a General Assembly resolution indicating clearly the direction to be taken on the road to peace and security in the Middle East. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to agree on such a resolution this year, but that certainly does not mean that the United Nations has not taken note of the development of that dynamic on the basis of the Madrid principles. While pointing to progress made, we must express concern about the reactivation of Israel's settlement policy, including the report of bidding for building an Israeli settlement in the Har Homa area —

Jebel Abu-Ghneim — in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian leadership is right to consider that action a violation of agreements that are in force, a stumbling block to further movement in negotiations and an impediment to the restoration of trust between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Such unilateral actions run counter to the norms of international law and are detrimental to a settlement in the region.

We urge the parties not to take measures that would prejudge the outcome of the forthcoming negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and the problem of Israeli settlements. We urge them to refrain from confrontational rhetoric and to comply with commitments made.

We expect the measures contained in the Memorandum to be implemented within the agreed time-frames, and we will do our utmost to encourage that. The results should prompt the sponsors to take further strong measures urgently with a view to unblocking the situation on the remaining negotiating tracks — the Syrian-Israeli and the Lebanese-Israeli tracks — because otherwise there can be no firm peace in the Middle East.

The basis for further negotiations between Syria and Israel is already formulated, and Security Council resolution 425 (1978) provides a firm international legal basis for a settlement of relations between Lebanon and Israel.

We welcome Israel's recognition of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). However that is not enough: what is needed is practical implementation. Russia will continue to promote a swift resumption of constructive dialogue on all of these interrelated tracks.

As a sponsor of the peace process, we attach great importance to the economic development of the Palestinian territories, including effective action by the donor structures geared towards promoting Palestinian self-rule and the economic and social development of the Palestinian territories. Russian representatives participated in the Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development, which began yesterday, 30 November, in Washington, and which dealt with these matters.

Untying the Middle East knot is a job for everybody. A variety of means is being used. The best minds and the leading statesmen of the entire world are involved in this effort, and a special role certainly belongs to the United Nations.

Russia, as a sponsor of the peace process in the Middle East, will continue to work hard to find mutually acceptable solutions and compromises in the positions of the parties concerned.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Japan welcomes the signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October, which broke the stalemate that had prevailed in the peace process since March 1997. On behalf of the Government of Japan, I wish to pay high tribute to the parties concerned for their good-faith efforts, which have resulted in this historic accord. I should also like to express the appreciation of my Government to the United States for convening the Wye River meeting and for its role in mediating the accord. His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan is owed a particular debt of gratitude for his wise and generous participation in the talks leading to the agreement.

Recognizing the importance of sustaining the momentum generated by the Wye River agreement, Japan welcomed the opportunity to participate in the Conference to Support Middle East Peace and Development, which began on 30 November, in Washington D.C., under the sponsorship of the United States Government. On that occasion, Japan pledged up to $200 million in assistance to the Palestinians over the next two years. In the conviction that cooperation and coordination among donors will continue to be important in the effective implementation of assistance, Japan intends to cooperate actively with donors through mechanisms such as the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee.

As one of the major contributors to the peace process, Japan has disbursed more than $370 million in grant aid to Palestinians since 1991. Combined with the amount pledged in Washington last month, Japan's aid to the Palestinians will amount to approximately $570 million. In July of this year the Government of Japan established an office in Gaza to ensure that such aid is used effectively; the Japan International Cooperation Agency also plans to open an office in the region.

Japan's assistance has been focused on activities to support the start-up and institutional capacity-building of the Palestinian Authority, basic infrastructure, Palestinian refugee relief and the development of employment opportunities. Japan intends to widen the scope of its assistance to also include human resources development in the areas of education and health, the improved governance of the Palestinian Authority, environmental protection, cultural and youth exchanges and industrial

promotion. In addition, my country intends to provide assistance through the United Nations Development Programme for such projects as the building of infrastructure to secure safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, which is essential to the implementation of the Wye River agreement.

I would like to mention here that, in addition to supporting the peace process through financial assistance, Japan is actively contributing personnel, including through the dispatch of its Self-Defence Forces to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

Japan has supported the current peace process since it was launched in Madrid in 1991. It has been an active participant in the multinational consultative group and has also been making various efforts at the bilateral level to encourage the Israeli and Arab parties to make further progress in the peace process. Multilaterally as well as bilaterally, Japan has sought to promote relations of mutual confidence among the parties concerned by supporting the implementation of the agreements to which the parties have committed themselves. Japan is determined to take every opportunity to facilitate the peace process by fostering an environment that is conducive to direct negotiations between the parties concerned.

The Government of Japan hopes that both parties will work towards the smooth implementation of all the provisions of the Wye River Memorandum. We are encouraged by recent positive actions by the Israeli side, including its approval, at a Ministerial meeting on 19 November, of the implementation of phase one of the redeployment in the West Bank and, subsequently, the preparations by the Israeli forces for withdrawal. The opening of the Gaza airport on 24 November is also a welcome development. Japan hopes that the redeployment and other measures on which agreement was reached will continue to be steadily implemented.

It is important that the final settlement talks, as well as negotiations on the third phase of the redeployment of Israeli troops, commence without delay. Again, I would stress that the two sides must strive to build mutual confidence, because the resolution of the outstanding issues between them will depend to an increasing degree on their own efforts. To this end, and as was made clear in the Wye River Memorandum, both parties should refrain from taking any unilateral actions that could destabilize the situation.

Unfortunately, however, extremists on both sides who engage in acts of terrorism continue to be a source of concern. The ultimate target of such acts is, of course, the peace process itself, which is our only hope for a final settlement. The Government of Japan does not tolerate terrorism in any form and commends the authorities of both Palestine and Israel for refusing to succumb to the threat of terrorism and for demonstrating their commitment to the smooth implementation of the peace process.

In closing, I would simply like to stress that highest priority must be given to direct talks by the parties concerned, including those responsible for further progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who wishes to make a statement in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): This afternoon, the General Assembly heard a statement by the representative of Israel that was full of allegations and distortions. Those distortions reveal a spirit of aggression, occupation and settlerism. That representative tried to speak of Syrian forces in southern Lebanon, a matter utterly unrelated to developments in the peace process or indeed to the situation in the Middle East.

The representative of Israel is the last person to have the right to raise such issues: Israel does not merely have forces based in southern Lebanon; it is the occupier of that area. Syrian forces, on the other hand, entered Lebanon to help and save our brethren in that country at the invitation of the Government and the people of Lebanon. They called upon Syria to save Lebanon from a civil war that Israel had welcomed as enabling it to continue its occupation and to keep plundering the wealth of Lebanon.

There is a long record of daily acts of aggression by Israel against the valiant people of Lebanon and against the Lebanese resistance, to which the United Nations Charter gives legitimacy. Can anyone really believe that those who are defending their occupied land, who are fighting to recover it from the clutches of the occupier, are terrorists? What historical definition or understanding could lead to such a characterization? Why else did the Charter provide for the inherent right of self-defence? All relevant resolutions of international legitimacy have

condemned Israeli aggression, occupation and settlement in the occupied Arab territories. Resistance is a legitimate right, indeed a sacred right.

Israel is the last to be in a position to speak of terrorism, especially since occupation heads the list of acts of terrorism. The latest example of such terrorism was the massacre perpetrated by Israel at Qana, in southern Lebanon. That exemplifies the ultimate terrorism: State terrorism. I do not understand how the representative of any State can speak so shamelessly of terrorism while his own country practices the ugliest form of terrorism: invading southern Lebanon in its Operation Grapes of Wrath. Where are the grapes of peace for which that representative calls?

Syria opened the door to the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference with abundant good will and with a determination to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. But Israel closed that door. Israel has refused to resume the peace process on the inseparable Syrian and Lebanese tracks from the point at which it was suspended. Earlier this afternoon, the Assembly heard that fact reaffirmed by my brother, the representative of Lebanon.

How can the representative of Israel explain away what he said in his statement about the question of Palestine? Yesterday he invoked certain religious claims to the Golan, while this afternoon in his statement on the situation in the Middle East he spoke of "secure borders". The occupation of the Syrian Golan is indeed a security issue. Let me refer the representative of Israel to the thick volume of Security Council and other resolutions of international legitimacy, all condemning Israeli occupation of the Golan, of southern Lebanon, of Palestinian territories and of Arab Jerusalem. Suffice it to remind him that President George Bush too stressed that geography cannot achieve security. The sole guarantee of security is a just and comprehensive peace based on the Madrid principles, which are in turn founded on the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. The latter principle is the very cornerstone of the initiative that President Bush set out before the United States Congress on 6 March 1991. It is the very principle on which the Madrid peace process was founded. It is the very spirit of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which speaks of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

That principle underscores the need for complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon. The line of 4 June 1967 was the line that the Israeli forces of aggression crossed into the Syrian Golan; it is therefore self-evident and natural that in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967) we should demand that that line be restored.

If Israel wants comprehensive peace, the door is open to the resumption of the peace process from the point at which it was suspended in the previous peace talks.

However, Israel must not attempt to mislead the world by speaking of peace while working for expansion and settlements and escalating tension and violence. We believe that the world has become quite expert about Israel's terrorist practices and policies which are based on terrorism. The world will no longer allow Israel to continue its attempts to mislead it because history is the best witness of all the myths and distortions, religious or otherwise, that run counter to international laws and resolutions agreed and adopted by the international community.

I should like to add in conclusion that a return by the General Assembly to the reports of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories would provide sufficient evidence of the Israeli policy of terror.

The representative in question, while attempting to throw stones at others, has forgotten that he lives in a glass house.

Syria is committed to a just and comprehensive peace. We reaffirm our desire to resume the peace process from the point where it was suspended. It is not reasonable or acceptable for talks to resume at square one and to ignore the arduous negotiations which resulted in agreements already concluded.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.